The Beat Generation

Drug Habit Keeps Them That Way

'Saints' in Void Way Out—Gone

By ANDREW MacFARLANE

SAN FRANCISCO—He had been writing in a 10-cent correspondence pad at a table in a corner of a half-empty Beat joint.

His shirt was dirty and his sports jacket had come a long way from the college fraternity where he once wore it.

He was very quiet, very cool.

When he spoke, his voice was toneless, dispassionate, unrelated, without animation; it had a sort of nowhere quality, as if he were just camping in his own body.

He handed me the poem he had been composing, and explained:

"It's like ah — the whole bit, see,—ah, all the same—a rat race—like I mean . . ."

The poem was a brief bulletin announcing that the world was a four-letter word.

He wasn't 25 yet, but he had the still, waiting look of an old man, never quite with you, listening to some terrible silence.

Why was he here on the beach?

"Well, like I was all hungup on this college scene — like those squares give me a pain right here, man — and — you know — they can have that junior executive bit too. For what? So you can pay taxes, and they can build more bombs . . . So I just cut out."

'Now I'm with It, Man'

And now?

"Now I'm with it, man — like you gotta experience everything — try everything. Dig. Swing.

Like drugs?

"Well, like that's a bad scene, man. Sick. No good."

How do you mean?

"You can get hung-up on a habit. I was on M, see, but I threw it. No, no, man, no good."

For the first time he showed a glint, a suggestion, of joining the conversation in person.

"I could write you a story," he said. "The underworld connections—the junkies (addicts)—the pushers (dope peddlers)—like, ah, how much do you think your paper would pay?"

As is the case with much Beat conversation, his thoughts require some interpretation.

First: M stands for morphine, a derivative of opium, used medically as a pain-killing sedative, and by dope addicts as a necessity of life.

Second: In the case of my acquaintance, the past tense was misleading. He was, by reputation and appearance, still addicted.

Third: Like most addicts, he was engaged in the endless search for enough money for his next fix.

Drug Truth Illuminating

And because of that he had offered to sell me a story about narcotics on the Beat scene which would be about as reliable as his conversation —at best, half true.

The whole truth about drugs and the Beat Generation is more illuminating, if less sensational.

Morphine, and its chemical descendant, heroin, are important factors in the development of the cool, hip, leave-me-alone Beat concept.

But their role is mainly a historical one.

M and H (sometimes known as Horse) are the tough, for keeps fuel of the drug addict's needle.

There is a distinct line between them and such other, less habit-forming narcotic items as marijuana cigarets, peyote mushroom buttons, and stimulants such as benzedrine.

The latter are "social drugs," they can be used for party kicks. Vicious though the results may be, the danger of addiction, at least, is less.

M and H, on the other hand, are strictly for the far, far-out hipster.

The junkie is a Beat saint.

He is hooked—self-crucified —on his habit.

There is no pleasure in it.

He is alone in a void, uninvolved, disengaged, dehumanized. Way, way out. Gone. Cool.

This sort of introspective, antisocial individual was well suited to the state of mind that gripped the early exponents of the cool jazz rebellion.

What narcotics could do to the state of their music is something else.

Greatest of Beat Gods

Nevertheless, some traditional jazzmen had used marijuana or drink to rev them up for their robust bandstand exercises.

And the new, other-world ascetic music complemented the use of soul-chilling junk.

One addict was Charlie Parker, reverently known among the Beat congregation by his nickname, Bird.

Of all the individual Beat gods, the Bird is probably the greatest.

The Bird is probably revered first because he is as far out as you can get—deceased; and second because of the circumstances leading up to his death.

Parker was committed to a mental hospital in his twenties and died at 34 of pneumonia complicated by drugs.

To the Beatnik, whose life sometimes appears to be the enactment of a death-wish, the Bird symbolizes the three most conclusive rejections of the Square world:

Abdication from human squareness through dope; escape from reality in mental illness, and, finally, oblivion.

The Beat boys and girls admire and imitate the withdrawn postures and attitudes that morphine and heroin helped formulate.

But though they worship at the shrine, few take upon themselves the junkie's stigmata—the countless puncture wounds of an addict's hypodermic.

For one thing, Square though it sounds, morphine and heroin are just too expensive.

Also, as my bar acquaintance pointed out, the drug scene can be a sick one.

He knows.

For him, the cool pose has turned into cold reality.

Hooked, Self-Crucified, Comfortable

He had his own reasons for joining the Beat colony. But that was long ago and he's probably forgotten them anyway. Now he couldn't leave if he wanted to. Narcotics see to that. Surrounded by fellow lost souls, primed with liquor and drugs, he finds it easy and comfortable to withdraw into himself—to be alone in a void, way, way out. Cool.

Praise Leaps Party Labels

Political feuds were forgotten yesterday by George Gregory, Liberal MLA for Victoria.

Chamber of Commerce directors passed a vote of thanks to the government for its co-operation on a goodwill tour to Oregon, and for Agriculture Minister Newton P. Steacy's services during the trip.

"Steacy is a pretty hard-working chap doing a good job," said Mr. Gregory.

Professional Group Added

A professional group for the Victoria Chamber of Commerce is to be formed as a result of a meeting this week of city professional men.

Dr. W. R. Wride, chamber director, said yesterday that a steering committee had been appointed. It consists of E. E. Pearlman, lawyer; Jorgen Baess, engineer, and Dr. Bernhard Kjekstad, dentist.

OLD REMEDY

Seaweed, rich in iodine, was eaten to combat goitre as early as the 12th century.

Traffic Deaths Drop Sharply

OTTAWA (CP) — Motor vehicle traffic fatalities in Canada during February fell 23 per cent to 121 from 157 a year earlier, the bureau of statistics reports.

B.C. toll dropped the most, to six from 15.

Conversation Piece

Genius Sufficient To Fill Bare Stage

Rudolf Flesch, the widely-known author of "Why Johnny Can't Read," will be appearing regularly in the Colonist with his wide-ranging column, "Conversation Piece."

By RUDOLPH FLESCH

Recently I went to see Sir John Gielgud in his one-man Shakespeare show, "Ages of Man." It was one of the most glorious and exciting evenings I ever spent.

Gielgud does his Shakespeare recitations in his dinner jacket, on a bare stage. The audience is offered nothing but a lectern upstage (which Gielgud approaches about six times during the evening) plus this middle-aged, bald man with his black tie, reciting the old, old standbys — Hamlet's soliloquy, Romeo's "It was the lark", the Queen Mab speech, some sonnets.

AUDIENCE WEPT

And yet it was tremendous theatre. When he was doing the abdication speech from "Richard II", Gielgud wept—and so did most of the audience.

When, toward the end of the evening, he was King Lear mourning Cordelia — "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all?"—he didn't cry: he was too deep in inexpressible grief.

AUDIENCE STUNNED

I glanced at the faces around me when he spoke those words. For the first time in my life I understood the meaning of the phrase "the audience was stunned."

Gielgud did his show in New York—after a triumphant U.S. tour around the country—at the same theatre where, a few weeks earlier, I had seen Jose Ferrer in a new play called "Edwin Booth."

EMBARRASSED

I had been there as a member of the Players' Club, at a preview the night before the opening. Like the rest of that audience, I had been embarrassed. It is painful to watch a show clearly destined to be a flop, and it is doubly painful if that show is offered as if it were the greatest thing since "Saint Joan."

RUDOLF FLESCH

IMAGINED HIT

Ferrer seemed to think he really had a hit on his hands. About a week after "Edwin Booth" opened (and a few days before it finally expired, dead as a doornail) he appeared on Ben Hecht's TV show and expressed amazement at the critics and the public who didn't appreciate the masterpiece. Ben Hecht nodded sagely and said he, too, thought it was a marvelous show.

LOTS OF TRICKS

"Edwin Booth" had Ferrer in it, who did his best, and what seemed like a cast of thousands, and oodles of expensive scenery and all sorts of tricks. Ferrer, as Booth, recited snatches from Shakespeare, Lincoln was killed off-stage, and at the end Booth died onstage and his ghost was seen wandering around, uttering words of other-worldly wisdom.

MISPLACED BELIEF

Obviously, Ferrer and his backers thought that if you give the public the life of a famous actor, with plenty of dramatic incidents, choice morsels from Shakespeare and lots of color and noise, you can't miss.

Maybe now, after having seen their show replaced by two hours of Sir John Gielgud on an empty stage, they know better.

Best Photos Tour Soon

TORONTO (CP) — Photographs from seven provinces are among the prize winners in the 12th annual national print show of the Commercial and Press Photographers' Association of Canada.

Nearly 200 photographs accepted for the show will go on a cross-country tour early in May. B.C. winner was Edward Pryor, Vancouver.

Dogs Massacre 500 Chickens

WINFIELD (CP) — Five hundred chickens were killed by dogs who romped through poultry pens in this community 14 miles north of Kelowna. Poultryman C. R. Weiss lost 481 birds valued at $300.

Owners of roving dogs are liable to a fine of up to $100.

Quarter-Milers Seek Personality Queen

Victoria Quarter-Milers car club is looking for an attractive young lady aged 16 to 23 to be "Miss Autorama" during their second annual Autorama at the Curling Club, May 22 and 23.

Club members want a girl with supercharged personality and sleek lines.

Applicants willing to be mistress of ceremonies, present trophies and participate in the May 24 Victoria Day parade, are asked to telephone Mrs. Betty Clark, of 3518 Calumet, at EV 3-6429.

Club spokesman Ray Cote said the Autorama will feature owners willing to answer questions and explain the working of their hot rods, custom-built cars, dream cars and go-karts.

There will also be drag race films and a live display of striping, he said.

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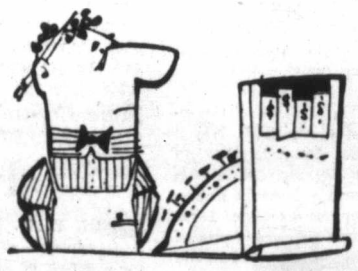
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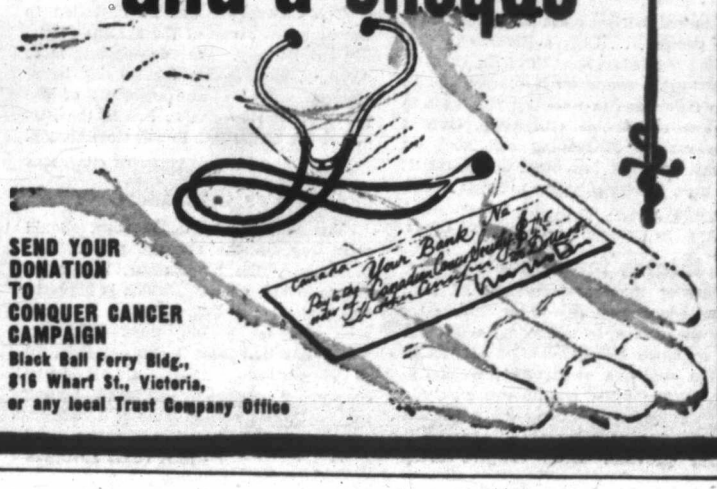
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